

GUEST COLUMN

Jackie Reese, Director of JSC's Employee Assistance Program



Have you ever built something hoping never to use it?

That is how I felt about a team that I formed here at Johnson Space Center – the Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team. I formed this group just over a year ago, and while I felt that such a team would be beneficial to have waiting in the wings, I hoped that JSC employees would never need the team's volunteers to come forward and do their job.

But now, these volunteers have indeed been needed.

They are civil servants and contractors, from many directorates, and they are giving of their time to help all of us work through our reactions to the *Columbia* tragedy.

The Critical Incident Team (CIT), part of the Employee Assistance Program, helps JSC employees through debriefings, which are small-group or individual discussions. The team members have all been trained by Roger Solomon, Ph.D., an international expert on crisis management.

The first priority for the CIT was to hold debriefings for employees in the directorates most closely related to the accident; however, we are available for all JSC employees and their dependents.

Our focus is on peer support – since we ourselves are all part of the JSC family, we are all going through the same emotions. We can identify with the hurt and say, "Yes, that's how the news hit me, too." During times like this, folks don't need psychobabble, they need chicken soup. We on the CIT are walking this path with you.

Some common emotions during a crisis such as this are:

- ★ numbness/shock
- ★ disbelief
- ★ guilt
- ★ bargaining/"If only I'd..."
- ★ sadness
- ★ anger

However, not everyone feels all of these, or even any of them. Every single person will react to a tragedy in a unique way.

One common question our team has heard during debriefings is: "Why is this hitting me so hard when I didn't know the crew?" While not everyone at JSC knew the STS-107 crew on a personal level, everyone here is somehow connected with each mission. Astronauts are a symbol of the good in NASA and in the United States, and it is natural to be emotionally distraught at their loss. It is also natural to identify with the pain that the crew's loved ones are feeling.

On the other side of the coin is another common question: "Why don't I feel anything yet in the aftermath of this catastrophe?" The answer to that is that everyone has a different way of feeling during a tragic event. One employee may experience numbness and not the anger or sadness that his or her officemate has felt. Neither reaction is better than the other.

Employees need to realize that there is no "right" way to be feeling now: the stages folks experience are not fixed or uniform. Rather, people's emotions often jump around from one feeling to another.

Everyone's experience is unique; however, there are some universal coping skills that can benefit almost anyone:

- ★ Talk about your experience with others; don't isolate yourself. Your friends and colleagues can sympathize with how you are feeling.
- ★ Take care of yourself: continue to eat right and exercise. This will help with stress and enable better sleep.
- ★ Avoid making major life decisions during very emotional times.
- ★ Stick with your routine – familiar things provide comfort.
- ★ Get involved in something meaningful to you.

Also, don't tell yourself that you need to "get over it." Loss like this isn't something you get over; it's something you learn how to live with.

If you are having trouble eating, sleeping and doing everyday things; if you are overly preoccupied with death and dying; or if you find yourself withdrawing from family and friends, the EAP is a resource for helping you to work through this time. All visits are completely confidential.

If you need our services, please schedule an appointment by calling x36130. Or if you are concerned about a coworker exhibiting these symptoms, you can offer to accompany him or her to an appointment or call the EAP for some helpful ideas.

Overall, the JSC workforce is doing remarkably well working through this. That's because we have remarkable people here. We are leaning on each other and looking for meaningful things to do. JSC employees are bright, dedicated and passionate, and I believe we are pouring those qualities into our grieving process, too. ❖

Center Director Message



FOCUS!...FOCUS!

I'm a Tae Bo enthusiast.

I exercise with Billy Blanks and the Tae Bo gang two or three times a week before I come to work. If you haven't tried it, I recommend it, particularly if

you have bum knees like me. You can get your heart rate up for 30-40 minutes in the confines of your family room without doing further damage to aging appendages.

As with anything else I do repetitively, my mind tends to wander as I go through the exercise regime. As if on cue, Billy will shout out "FOCUS, FOCUS!" I, in turn, suck my gut back in and pay attention to the proper execution of the routine.

I've found myself tending to be in a state of distraction for the past several weeks. I'll arrive at work, not remembering how I got there. My mind wants to wander in meetings, and it's difficult to pay attention to even normal conversations. It's almost like being in a state of mental dizziness, if there is such a thing. I sense that I'm not the only one around here with that problem.

There is good reason for experiencing this phenomenon. Our JSC world has been turned upside-down. We are being caught up in personal grief, mishap investigations, public conjecture and criticism, etc. Our normal, although very hectic, routine has been cast aside and each day brings different circumstances.

Here's the rub: we can't allow ourselves to surrender to this condition! We are committed to professional excellence and professionals don't surrender to distraction. There's also too much at stake. Astronauts preparing for future missions are depending on us keep them out of harm's way. The valiant crew of STS-107 would be terribly disappointed if we used their tragedy as an excuse for dropping the ball.

We must press on! We must stay on top of our game. As Billy Blanks would say, "FOCUS! FOCUS!"

Beak sends....

FROM THE DESK OF LT. GEN. JEFFERSON D. HOWELL JR.

Mandatory IT Security Training

All JSC employees, both civil servants and contractors, are required to complete the annual IT Security Training (ITS) by June 30, 2003. General users must take the Basic ITS for 2003 and managers must take ITS for Managers 2003. The modules are available on the NASA Site for Online Learning and Resources (SOLAR):

<https://solar.msfc.nasa.gov/solar/delivery/public/html/newindex.htm>

To complete the training, employees must enter their SOLAR user name and password. To request a new password, please click the "My Account" tab on the SOLAR homepage, or call the SOLAR helpdesk at 1-866-419-6297. New passwords are issued within 30 minutes.

Point of Contact: Chris Ortiz, JSC IT Security Manager- x31904.